

The Clipper Visits...

Peter Buttkus

By CHRIS PECK



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Peter Buttkus talks so modestly about his tree department that you would never suspect it has received many awards.

"Roadside mowing, trimming back intersections, the little stuff people don't think about is really what we do," he says.

A big man, dressed in khakis and work boots, Buttkus looks as if he is more at home surrounded by the trees and landscaping cared for by his Department of

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The purpose of planting street trees, besides aesthetics, Buttkus says, is to provide radiant cooling.

"One good shade tree can do the same as 10 air conditioners," he said. "It shades the house, shades the street, shades the lawn," he added. "Trees also help cool the asphalt, which generates a lot of heat, they break the wind, produce oxygen and hold soil for erosion control."

Duxbury also had to demonstrate that the town spent more money in its tree department budget this year than last year. The 1995 budget was \$89,578, that included salaries, plant materials, tools and equipment, including the contracting of a crane service when needed.

Another award received in 1995, was the Growth

Award, given for education and public relations. Duxbury was cited for increasing its planting program and its composting program available at the transfer station to anyone in town. His department is also using the composting material in caring for the athletic fields.

For education, Buttkus also said the town supports any course his workers want to take. There are 3 certified arborists on staff, including Buttkus, who also holds an international certification.

Buttkus, who has been with the department since 1994, holds a degree in Arboriculture and Park Management from the University of Massachusetts.

The Land and Natural Resources Department is basically in charge of maintaining all the trees in town, all the landscaping of public buildings and parks, assisting the Conservation Department in care of trees and assisting the highway department with plowing.

But maintaining the town's athletic fields is another major job for land and natural resources. This year the fields will get \$85,000 worth of underground sprinklers for the first time.

"Water is the only way we can really have a good playing surface," said Buttkus.

The irrigation systems are scheduled to be installed in July, between the busy playing seasons, behind DJSHS, Train field, located in front of DES and at the Lower Alden field, behind the new library.

Land and Natural Resources than posing with tree awards in hand.

But the awards were earned for the department's dedication to the care of trees. And, while Buttkus may think his department's work goes unnoticed, the recent town-wide survey found a full 87 percent cited the ambiance, including the naturalness of Duxbury's appearance, as what they liked best about the town.

Some of that appearance was a gift from nature but the 5-man Land and Natural Resources crew has kept it looking that way.

The Tree City USA, a national award has been earned by Duxbury 5 years in a row, which even the modest Buttkus points out is unusual.

The award is sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service, the National Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the National Assn of State Forests, the USDA Forest Service, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and National League of Cities.

Duxbury meets a lengthy list of criteria for the citation.

The town is required to have a tree department, a tree ordinance and comply with Chapter 87 of Massachusetts state law.

In the mid-70's, Duxbury also declared every road in town a scenic road, under the Scenic Road Act, which, Buttkus said, was very unusual but also an effective way to preserve the trees.

"In order to remove a town tree, you have to go through a lengthy hearing process," he said. It was designed to deter developers from ripping down trees unnecessarily and Buttkus said it works.

"Oh, definitely. It's against the law," he adds.

As part of the award, the town is also required to have an Arbor Day observance and education program for children. On April 26, seedlings will be distributed to first graders in Chandler School in cooperation with the Duxbury Garden Club.

Also, an 8 to 10 foot Liberty Elm will be planted at DJSHS so that the children can monitor its growth. Buttkus said the tree could be 20 feet tall by the time those first graders are in junior high school.

Duxbury is also required to have a formal work plan in place for identifying and removing structurally unsafe trees and to replant other trees in their place. Safe pruning is also required as is an aggressive street trees program.

"This town really has a tremendous athletic program but we really don't have the amount of space we should," according to the lands department head.

He said the irrigation system is the best way to keep the overused fields in good shape.

"It doesn't take an agronomist to figure out that without water if we have 6,000 people running on a field all year long, you are going to end up with dust," Buttkus said.

Dust is about what the town had ended up with after an aggressive fertilizing and replanting program that had its fields in top shape for spring but "decimated" after a dry summer.

"When you get a drought, you get a lot of insects too and the field just gets wiped out," Buttkus said.

"If you don't have water, you don't have anything," he added.